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which is equally immutable, since it too comes to them from a higher source than earthly.

Jeremiah's letter is one of the simple, brave words which make a period in religious history. A man, to this prophet, owes a double allegiance, and Israel, from this time onward, when its kingdom and nationality are doomed, may need to acknowledge both an earthly master and a heavenly. He can be loyal to both. To the credit of the exiled community and of the Jew the letter did not go for nothing. For it is precisely in Babylonia that Judaism sets its ideal Jew after Jeremiah's pattern in the great figure of Daniel. Serving his new masters with a loyal mind, setting all his disciplined intelligence and his moral integrity at the command of the king to whom his God has willed that he should be subject, he keeps his soul his own. And, when Nebuchadrezzar demands an obedience which trenches on the Jew's conscience, he finds the submissive and useful servant a steel rod. Or, as is said about three other exiles, "O Nebuchadrezzar, we are not careful to answer thee in this matter. If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us out of thine hand, O king. But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods."

That is the note which Jeremiah is the first to strike in his letter, the note of the dual allegiance which has made the pathos and the tragedy and the glory of his people's history through the long centuries.

ADAM C. WELCH.

IS GOD KNOWABLE ?

UNDER this familiar heading I wish to discuss not so much the philosophical problems it may suggest, as the scope and nature of the knowledge of God which we obtain through.

faith. How far does the Christian's believing knowledge of God reach ? We assume it to be a genuine knowledge; the statement "God is love" is true of reality beyond and other than our minds, and is not less true although neither we nor others are for the time being attending to it. It affirms an objective fact which cognition accepts as given but does not create. Religious truth is apprehensible under conditions that in some ways differ from those which enable men to grasp the truths of science, but in either case it is *truth* we are talking of. There have been writers who maintained that the Beautiful is one of man's self-preservative fictions, that in fact beauty is not in things but in the contemplating mind, at least so far as concerns animate nature. This is no doubt wrong, but it has been argued by people whose æsthetic sensibilities were keen. Artists themselves, they were content to say that the beauty and sublimity of natural objects are not qualities of things as they are, but subjective emotions in the bystander. But in religion it is different. You do not find Christian believers adopting the position that God, or His forgiveness of sins, or the reality of the soul are subjective imaginings; for them the truth of the utterances of the religious consciousness, as of the moral, is a question of life and death.

But is this knowledge of God, whose truth we take for granted, limited or unlimited in scope ? Is it complete or partial ? And if there is that in God of which, even as Christians, we remain profoundly ignorant, what guarantee is there that this hidden and outlying region of His nature may not be fatally incongruous with what has been revealed ? In a word, is our knowledge of God through Christ, incomplete as it may be, wholly conclusive ?

It is interesting to note that the teaching of the New Testament on the point is superficially ambiguous. Thus

in one place St. Paul repeats the ancient question : " Who hath known the mind of the Lord ? " and immediately answers himself with the triumphant words : " We have the mind of Christ." But significantly enough the same question recurs, in the eleventh chapter of Romans, with a new accent. " How unsearchable," he writes, " are His judgments, and His ways past finding out. For who hath known the mind of the Lord ? " What is uppermost here is agnosticism rather than the confidence of trustful insight. Or again, St. John makes the striking claim : " Ye have an anointing from the Holy One, and ye all know," which recalls the reported promise of Christ, before His departure, concerning the Spirit : " He shall teach you all things." Yet St. Paul can say : " We know in part." It almost seems as if the New Testament itself were in two minds on the subject, now affirming our real knowledge of God and divine things, now calling it in question. " To know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge "—this balancing of insight with ignorance recurs over and over. We know, yet we do not know. What is the upshot of it all ? How far does our believing acquaintance with the Divine nature extend ?

Our possession of any complete knowledge of God is rendered highly improbable, to say the least, by our lack of a complete knowledge of ourselves. In great measure we are a mystery to our own minds, and the psychology of the unconscious or subliminal heightens this impression. Of other men we know still less. Shadows too are cast on God and His methods from various quarters ; the trials of good men, the crowding tragedies of history, the swaying conflict of higher and lower within ourselves. These things do not encourage the claim of omniscience.

In addition, many difficulties flow from the symbolical or analogical character of human thinking. Our thought

of necessity is coloured from end to end by sense-experience ; may not this so distort our views of Deity that they become more false than true ? Are we entitled to carry over into descriptions of God features which obviously have their origin in the experience of an embodied spirit—not to speak of attributes, such as eternity and omnipresence, which derive much of their meaning from the simple negation of spatial and temporal limits ? Even the term “ person,” as applied to God, is notoriously subject to criticism. “ Father ” is admittedly a symbol, and Arius went wrong because he took it literally. If we sum up these considerations, what do they amount to ? How far can the Christian mind count on really knowing the inner being of God ?

The objection that our thoughts of God are unavoidably symbolic may be dealt with in three ways. In the first place, it might be held that our ideas, sense-born as they may be, are yet quite exact, and convey a wholly accurate and precise knowledge of the Divine nature. Or, after a regretful admission that symbolic thought can never be more than approximately correct, it may be argued that the best plan is to cut out the symbolic element relentlessly and make the attempt to describe God in purely abstract terms. Or once more, you may hold that in religious symbols there is nothing to be ashamed of, and that if only the symbols used are the worthiest human experience can furnish, it is precisely by means of them, with all their inadequacy from the intellectual point of view, that we receive true and saving impressions of God. On reflection, I think, it will prove that it is the last of these three suggestions which best suits the genius of Christian faith.

I.

The first contention is that symbolic thinking in religion calls for no defence inasmuch as it gives an exact and

altogether satisfactory representation of the Divine reality. Probably its keenest advocates will only press this view with reservations. No one takes a phrase like "the finger of God" literally. The law of Israel forbade pictures or images of God, but Hebrew religious poetry took its revenge in the most daring imaginative representations of the Divine being and action; yet it is quite certain psalmists and prophets would have listened with amazement to the plea that passages like the following were exactly true: "Stir up Thyself, and awake to my judgement, even unto my cause, my God and my Lord" (Ps. xxxv. 23), or "I have put My words in thy mouth, and have covered thee in the shadow of Mine hand, that I may plant the heavens, and lay the foundations of the earth" (Isa. li. 16). It is questionable whether any modern theologian would venture to interpret the name "Father" or "Son," as applied to the distinctions in the Godhead, with such verbal precision as to consider himself justified in drawing explicit inferences from the name itself, the inference, for example, that the Godhead is on a par with a human family. Even the conception "personality," though the best available, is not to be transferred without alteration from our own life. In us personality has a beginning; it has growth and may have decay; it is manifested through a body: but these things no one will predicate of God just as they stand. No doubt when we say "God is love," the symbolic element appears to be ready to vanish away; yet "love" is taken from a human emotion which indisputably in some respects is worthy to be ascribed to God, but in other respects must be denied, in so far as "love" in earthly life connotes passion or turbulent agitation such as is inconsistent with the absolute Divine freedom. Thus our loftiest notions come short. To call them exact would be to wrong the spirit of religion, for the religious mind, as it rises in the

scale, becomes ever more deeply aware that a God whom we could perfectly measure and comprehend would be wholly unequal to our need. Such a God, deprived of every unsearchable and ineffable quality, and reduced to the limits of our day-by-day conceptions, would no longer be the infinite and exalted One before whom we bow in lowly worship, but an idol built to suit our fancies, controlled by our wayward and mistaken desires, apt to incorporate our dubious and self-satisfied ideals. We might well shrink from the thought that we could "find out the Almighty unto perfection," for in that case reverence would promptly die and the boundless cravings of the heart would once for all be condemned to unfulfilment. As Goethe has expressed it, *Du gleichst dem Geist, den du begreifst*. Thus it is of cardinal importance for faith itself that the element in the idea of Divinity which breaks through language and escapes should never be forgotten. The name "God" must bring us to our knees in awe and wonder, and it has been well said by Otto that the man who does not understand the words put on Abraham's lips, "I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord, *who am but dust and ashes*," is a stranger to the inmost meaning of religion.

It is of course true that the ideas we form of great men, of famous religious heroes and leaders of the past, are themselves inexact and approximate. But the difference between the two cases is clear. Our conceptions of Luther, Wesley, Chalmers, Lincoln are all but certainly idealised. It is not that these great figures were not great and good, but that the cool historian, studying the sources impartially, would undoubtedly inform us that we had failed to picture them to ourselves as they really were—"warts and all," in Cromwell's phrase. To say this is not cynicism but historical conscience. They did possess the attributes

of excellence and courage we ordinarily ascribe to them, but in every case—one Name excepted—the great men of history exhibited, beside these qualities, other defects and weaknesses which later idealisation has obliterated. They themselves, we may be certain, would have been the first to protest with indignant and amused surprise, or perhaps with a rather sad smile, against the poetic perfection in which their character has been dressed. It is otherwise with the thoughts we form of Deity. These thoughts and pictures, we have seen, are in no sense precise copies of the Divine fact; they are inadequate, however, not because they are too good for the reality but because they are not good enough. We have added to them subjective elements; the broken mirror of imagination has defaced the higher object; but the effect has been not to glorify an imperfect reality but to darken and distort the perfection of God. We need never fear that our words have said too much or climbed too far. “As the heavens are high above the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts.”

II.

The second proposal is to exclude rigorously from our thought of God all those figurative elements which, with whatever psychological inevitability, have been carried over from human life. For if these conceptual instruments are as defective as we have found them to be, why should they any longer be used? Let us rather renounce altogether the practice of thinking about God in terms derived from the concrete facts of experience. It is in abstract terms alone that He can be conceived as He really is, in His transcendence and absoluteness. This is the policy commended by writers of the right wing of Hegelianism, best exemplified in Biedermann of Zürich. He reaches

what he describes as "the pure and only adequate concept of Absolute Spirit" by discarding, one after the other, not merely the more distinctly emblematic ingredients of religious thought, but even such predicates as will, knowledge and feeling. These are human and therefore cannot be Divine. To say that God wills or knows or feels is so earthly as to defeat its own purpose.

Behind this theory we seem to discern the features of an old but ever-renewed fallacy. This is the view that uneducated people and those who speak to them on religious topics have unfortunately no choice but to employ a certain picture language in which God is set forth by means of carnal parables and analogies, whereas the select circle of the philosophically-minded is privileged to use the abstract and scientific speech of pure knowledge. As one writer points out, this is an error which appears in other fields. "Many a scientific man imagines that when, convinced by investigation, he has stated that light consists in vibrations of the ether, the full and exact knowledge of what light really is is now in his possession; but while he certainly has grasped the object of his study more correctly than the ignorant layman could, and has risen superior to the ordinary delusions of sense, after all he has seen the object only as it appears to his scientifically equipped vision, and has unwittingly made additions of his own to what he sees, thereby shaping and colouring his idea of it." And so with the theologian. He cannot think with anything but a human mind, and the human mind uses and will always use imaginative thought-forms. Thus when Biedermann proceeds to formulate his own definition of God, it turns out to be expressed in language as really, though not perhaps quite so obviously, pictorial in quality, as redolent of sense-born imagery, as any he had previously rejected. When, for example, instead of speaking of God's

“consciousness,” which he regards as a term unduly human, he speaks of His *Insichsein*, as though this special word represented the language of pure thought, he has really sunk, not risen in the scale of expression. For with all its defects, “consciousness” is a spiritual or mental word, and what it means we know to some extent, but *Insichsein*, or “being-in-self,” is a spatial term properly, and what it suggests of spiritual meaning is vague and indeterminate. The path to which Biedermann mistakenly invites us is, if followed out to its logical termination, the path of pure negativity which at last plunges down into a blank featureless Absolute devoid of all positive or recognisable attributes and therefore not really capable of description; this we are to call blindly, God. Now exactly this was a point which non-Christian mysticism had reached of itself, as the furthest limit of human apprehension; and it is very odd that the Christian idea of God, now that Jesus has been here, should simply coincide with the results attained by Greek and Indian sages, and should not really offer anything that is new. We are once more driven to the confession that every religious idea formed even by the most persistently critical philosopher represents the Divine in symbolic forms of intuition, borrowed from the phenomena of time and space. Grace and freedom are conceived under the figure of the confluence of two finite forces; revelation and piety are conceived as though they were two different facts, separated by an interval of time. We do not escape from this difficulty by restricting our choice of conceptions to the field of inward spiritual experience. There too the only categories we can find are inadequate, and we fall back by instinct, which is really guided by a deeper reason, into pictures and parables.

III.

Let us now turn to the third method. It recommends us frankly to concede that religious thinking must always remain imaginative and pictorial, therefore inexact from the critical point of view, and yet to hold that by means of these very symbolic media we have a true and satisfying knowledge of God. There can be no doubt at all that, alone of the three, this suggestion is in harmony with the inner character of Christian faith. To put the case briefly : if we apply the principle that the cause is known through its effects, we may rightly describe the Power confronting us in Jesus Christ as the Power of sovereign holy Love. To those who have felt this Power it is the most real thing in the universe ; indeed, the standard and measure of all reality and value. It is highest in the highest sphere of all spheres known to us ; it is a Personal Life, intent on fellowship with man ; for the irreducible minimum of Christian faith may be said to be this, that a world with Jesus in it is a world with a great and loving God over it. Henceforward the name of God is not simply a mystery ; it is a significant name, the content of which, though set in pictorial forms, we have constraining reason to regard as trans-subjectively true. Insoluble problems, it is still admitted, gather round the *degree* of adequacy with which the ideas of faith transcribe the facts of God's being, thus presented in Jesus ; but the abiding sense we have of their partial inadequacy no more necessitates the negation of their truth, so far as they go, than the same kind of inadequacy in our conception of the character and inner experience of a friend compels us to regard him as a subjective illusion. We have a right to go on believing that, as confronted and evoked by Jesus Christ, faith does grasp the side of God's being which is turned towards men. If a symbolic colour is fatal to religious knowledge, it is equally

fatal to the real insight of ethics, history, and common life.

The insight of faith, however, is in one sense quite fragmentary. Nor can anyone so well afford to confess this as a Christian. Our grasp of the Father certifies to us, indeed, the fact of Providence, but the method or process of providential guidance is as much hidden from the Christian as from others. We cannot look on at God's operations through His eyes ; we cannot see the details of His purpose in the world from the inner side, or as He sees them. Theoretical teleology can never be for us anything more than a matter of suggestion ; for, until we know the whole, the function of the part within the whole remains a matter of hypothesis ; and there is nothing in the Gospel itself to alter this.

None the less, the full assurance of faith is to the effect that, in spite of our ignorance of the inner processes, to call them so, of the Divine mind, as well as of the detailed actualisation of the Divine purpose in history, we do actually know God Himself. And this assurance includes, as part of itself, the further certainty that the innermost secret of God's being—that in God by virtue of which He *is* God—lies in what has been disclosed to us in Jesus, not in the still veiled region which, in this life at all events, is inaccessible and by its very nature cut off from our present knowledge ; and that this veiled region contains nothing which could impair or cancel the revelations of the known. When St. John wrote, " No man hath seen God at any time," he passed judgment on the curiosity that would pry into the life of Him " Who dwells in light that none can approach " ; when he added, " the only-begotten Son, who is in the Father's bosom, hath brought Him out to view," he affirmed the reality and sufficiency of faith's apprehension of God. The Christian, ignorant as he may be of much concerning

God, is only beginning the process of spiritual knowledge, so to speak, from the other end ; sure of the character and mind of the Father, he is working outward from this centre, not inwards from without. Once the main question has been settled for ever, subordinate problems, painful as they may be, can be borne calmly. To quote Illingworth's impressive parallel : " The great politician, or philosopher, or poet, is known to the outer world by the work that he has done ; but his child, his wife, his friend, who know the human heart within him, are content in that great knowledge to leave all else alone."

Thus it is not the case that, by confessing the logically inadequate character of religious ideas, we leave Christian faith an open tumbling-ground for whimsies. There is no need to fear lest the acknowledgment of a region in God beyond all human thought should place us at the mercy of every sort of superstition, breaking in casually from the beyond, as though the unsurveyed domain might be peopled with shapes of fear and darkness. Doubts, after all, can never cancel knowledge. We have met in Christ a God whom we can trust without reserve ; with the Reformers, we know " no other God than the God who has manifested Himself in the historical Christ, and made us see in the miracle of faith that He is our salvation." That complete trust is qualitatively perfect though not quantitatively synoptic ; it fixes a principle, though from where we stand we cannot see far or wide enough to apply the principle in detail to each element in the life of God. The admission that there might be in God certain moral characteristics at variance with sovereign Love would not merely plant irrational dualism at the heart of the moral order ; it would kill that confidence in Jesus through which our mind has opened to faith in the Father.

But if as Christians we possess a spiritually adequate

knowledge of God, in the strength of which we live, is it possible to find fit words for this knowledge ; such words or expressions, that is, as will truthfully convey it to other minds ? Can we communicate what we know ? We can, provided the symbols with which our words are charged be drawn only from the purest and loftiest range of human experience. In other words, they must be derivable from those fields of life where personality is manifested most worthily. Not from the domain of law or commerce, but from social and family life at their highest. The same symbol is not everywhere useful. "There are parts of the world," it has been noted, "where the whole set of ideas which we associate with the 'Lamb of God' can make no appeal, because the sheep is a savage animal." The Christian name for God is "Father," and that it should be so is no accident. For while the name is a symbol after all and may often have called up a mental image far too human to be true, while inferences based directly on a metaphor and developed with ruthless logic have in the past done much to discredit theology, yet in this case two countervailing considerations may be pled. In the first place, by discarding the term "Father," we should not gain in adequacy, but lose. To affirm the Fatherhood of God may be unsatisfactory or meaningless from the point of view of ontology, but to deny it, as Christians are convinced, is to diverge immensely further from the truth. Instead of rising to that which is ethically and spiritually superior, the mind sinks inevitably to something lower, to the pantheistic and sub-personal. And secondly, it cannot be forgotten that the New Testament defines this Fatherhood in a quite concrete manner ; it defines it as relative to the experience of Jesus Christ. God, it teaches, is such a Father as is mirrored in Jesus' mind. Hence while in contemplating the Fatherhood of God

we should of course concede that hope and fear, joy and pain, perplexity and aspiration are not to be ascribed to God in the form they assume in the experience of a father on earth—indeed, in some of these instances, are not to be ascribed to God at all—yet we do contend, with the revelation given through Christ on our side, that the love, the care, the wisdom, the spirit of self-sacrifice which are imperfectly revealed in earthly fatherhood, exist in utter perfection in the Eternal. Our ideas, our symbols, are indeed unworthy of their object; the form is incurably unequal to the matter; we have the treasure in earthen vessels. Yet while the vessels are earthen, they convey treasure to the needy, and through them the life and power of God reach and save us.

This means that to a great extent the business of theology consists in the criticism of religious symbols. It is far from being a matter of indifference which pictures or images men use to set forth the supersensible and transcendent. In the vocabulary of the believing there exist at every stage certain pictorial representations of God and His action which are long past their best and have yielded all the service to Christian thought of which they are capable. It is high time to place them on the retired list, or at all events to relegate them to strictly subordinate functions. Everyone knows, for example, that a useful classification of theories of the Atonement might be formed according to the kind of symbol which each theory employs, and that there are numerous elements in the military, or the legal, or the commercial theories of the past with which the Christian mind will not work any more. It is difficult to overestimate the aid—often most unwillingly accepted—given to Christian theology by the searching strictures passed on such religious symbols by the heretic and the sceptic. They have compelled the Church to do more

efficiently its task of ever-renewed inspection and review. They have called attention to the moral inconsistency of divergent symbols or to the impossibility of taking mere symbols as the basis of argument, for too often in the history of doctrine tempting figures have been pressed in the most inconsiderate fashion by a mode of thought which is full of delusions. In this matter, theology is called to be a conscience to the Church. Its work is not to purge religious thought of symbol—this can never succeed—but to waken men to the fact that their ideas about God *are* really symbolic and hence perpetually in need of being tested afresh by experience and reflection; and, in addition, to re-examine current figures in the light of Jesus' revelation of God. This perennial duty to elevate and refine the conceptions which piety makes use of is itself a salutary reminder that our knowledge of God, our insight into His life, is but in part.

In discharging this critical task, theology, it would seem, is bound to obey two rules or principles. In the first place, every figure or expression must be eliminated which is calculated to suggest a thought of God unlike Jesus Christ. There is no need to say that every true idea about God must be derivable from Christ; everything essential is secured if we say that no idea can be admitted which is out of harmony with Him. And again, while Christian men undoubtedly are free to strike out such new images or symbols as in their considered judgment will better serve to bring home the Christian message to their own time, the new symbolism must be vitally continuous with the old. Amidst changing terminologies there must remain a kernel or nucleus of *meaning* which does not change, but preserves and perpetuates the historic self-identity of Christian faith. This innermost core, as it were, of description can be mediated best of all by the

symbol of Fatherhood, under the strong safeguards against misunderstanding of the name which are furnished by the Gospels. God is the Father of Jesus Christ our Lord, and our Father through Him.

H. R. MACKINTOSH.

*APOSTOLIC PROGRESS IN CATHOLICITY IN
SPITE OF A SPURIOUS CITATION.*

I.

THE book of Amos, as it stands, ends with a prophecy which included the following as its salient particular, that Jahweh would raise up the tabernacle of David which was fallen, and extend the borders of the kingdom so as to comprehend all the nations over which the name of Jahweh had once been called, i.e., all that had ever owned Israel's supremacy, and thereby acknowledged at the same time the sovereignty of Israel's God (Amos ix. 11-12).

The interest of this prediction is greatly enhanced by the fact that it played a part in the discussion of the Council held in Jerusalem for the consideration of the then burning question whether circumcision was necessary to the salvation of Gentile believers (Acts xv. 1-2). The Gospel had been preached with good results at Antioch, which, though the capital of Syria, was practically a Greek city. But while the auspicious movement was still in progress "certain men" came down from Judæa who taught the brethren that, to be saved, they must be circumcised after the custom of Moses (Acts xv. 1); and thereby raised quite a storm in the infant Christian community.

The question was referred to an assembly of apostles and elders specially convened for the occasion. Peter opened the discussion by declaring himself in favour of exempting